

## It Looks Ugly, But It's Clean (Oh Momma Don't Fuss Over Me) by OurLadyofPerpetualWallflowers

**Series:** [Indiana Beaches](#) [1]

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**Genre:** Canonical Child Abuse, Character Study, Domestic Violence, Gen, billy is fucked up, max mayfield (mentioned) - Freeform, not explicitly harringrove but we all know what i was thinking

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Neil Hargrove, Susan Hargrove

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**Summary:**

There'd been no punishment for that night at the Byers' place, for staggering in at dawn after Max had snuck into her bed and left his car crooked on the street. Nothing beyond a disappointed sigh and a look but Billy knows this routine, grew up with it, so he's been ready for it for weeks.

And here it is. Neil's been working him over for about an hour, carefully choosing his hits and grapples to not leave any marks that can't be explained by 'boys being boys'. Billy thinks about the framed and polished Army medals in his dad's bedroom, the pressed and carefully bagged uniform in the back of the closet. Neil learned from the best.

God bless America, right?



## **It Looks Ugly, But It's Clean (Oh Momma Don't Fuss Over Me)**

It doesn't hurt like it used to.

That's Billy's main thought as his father lands a sharp jab to his kidneys and Billy drops to the floor. Max is at that dance-The Snowball, god what a corny name-and Billy had been given express orders to drop her off and come home until it was time to pick her up. He'd known what that meant. There'd been no punishment for that night at the Byers' place, for staggering in at dawn after Max had snuck into her bed and left his car crooked on the street. Nothing beyond a disappointed sigh and a look but Billy knows this routine, grew up with it, so he's been ready for it for weeks.

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There's a pause as Neil waits for Billy to steady himself on his knees and then right on cue there's a fist in his hair, yanking his head back for a slap.

Billy takes it, it's always easier to take it, he doesn't fight back, not ever, not again, not with his fists. That had been a bad night. He still doesn't remember all of it. But there was a lot of blood.

Neil says something, more crap about respect and responsibility, but Billy's not listening really. This is the wind down, where Neil brings up all the reasons Billy deserves this and how it's for his own good again. The wind up is the important part, that's where Neil tells him what he did wrong this time, gives him a hint as to why the rules have changed. This part Billy can ignore, even if the insults fly sharper and cut deeper when he's already on his knees.

Whatever.

Susan's speaking now, something about dinner, and Billy carefully doesn't look at her. He can't. There's four players in this game and they all have different rules to follow. That's one of his.

Rule number four: Don't look at Susan when Neil's in the room.

They go to the kitchen, leaving Billy on the floor, and he carefully prods his stomach for any signs of damage beyond the normal. It's tender, hurts like a motherfucker, but there's no hard feeling that says he's bleeding somewhere major. He'll piss blood for a bit but that's nothing new. He checks in his mirror from where he's sitting and there's a faint mark from the slap but nothing else. Billy snorts at his own reflection. Neil's the best around, no wonder the government sent him to this scrubby little town to run security for that stupid lab.

There's a shadow in the doorway and Susan's there, hands placing a plate of food and the battered first aid kit from the bathroom just inside the door. She risks a glance at him, and her sorrow-filled eyes hurt worse than his father's fists. Billy stares at her for a minute and then nods, looking past her to the hallway where he can hear Neil's silverware clinking.

Thanks. He tries to say with his face and Susan just as soundlessly disappears back to the kitchen. She has her own rules and helping him in any way is breaking one but she does it whenever she can. Billy's not sure what to make of that. It sends uncomfortable thoughts swirling in the back of his head, thoughts about his mother and the house on the hill in San Francisco, thoughts he viciously shoves away.

He reaches out and manages to snag the plate and the plastic case, pulls them back over and hides the case under his bed behind a toolbox and a stack of school books. There'll be time for that later. He glances at the food; meatloaf, peas, rice with gravy. Neil's idea of a balanced diet. Susan's idea of things easy to eat with a busted face. It's rare that Neil goes too far but it happens. Susan hasn't learned the signs yet. She will.

Billy digs in, using his fingers and chewing gently. It's good, Susan

can cook, and he's cleaned the plate in minutes. It joins the first aid kit under his bed. He'll drop it off in the kitchen later, after he gets Max. He used to wonder if Neil ever questioned how Billy got food on the nights he didn't join them for a "family dinner" but he stopped after awhile. Neil doesn't care. A glance at his watch and there's still time before that dance is over, so he stretches out on the floor and carefully tries not to think as he flexes each muscle in turn, checking for damage.

There's a sharp noise from the kitchen, a chair abruptly pushed back, and Billy holds his breath for the sound of a smack or a sob, something that says Neil's starting on Susan. Billy would get up for that, take the plate in and redirect the attention, probably get another punch or two, but there's nothing, just the sound of the television coming on. Almost idly he wonders what would happen if he walked in there and put his fist through the TV set, wonders what Neil's face would look like before he got up and reminded Billy why that's a stupid idea, and he snorts at the idea of doing it just to find out.

He knows it's not worth it, not worth making the beatings worse, not worth the way he'll lose and give Neil even more to lord over him. And Billy always loses. That's rule number two. No matter how strong or tough or stubborn he thinks he is, Neil is always going to beat him. There's too much history there, too many years where Billy was weaker and smaller and didn't understand how the world worked. Unbidden, his fingers find the pendent on his neck, gently rubbing over the raised image of the Virgin Mary. Despite his best efforts, he thinks back to the house on the hill, to when he was a dumb kid like Max, to when he learned the rules.

He remembers his grandmother taking him to church on Sundays, fussing over his curls and his pants, pressing a quarter into his hand so they could light a candle for his grandfather who died before he was born and for who Gran said six Hail Marys for every week. He remembers her giving him the necklace on his tenth birthday, wrapping his small fingers around it and guiding him through the words of the prayer. *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.*

He remembers following all the rules back then, not just his own. Getting good grades and dressing like a preppy brat, doing everything

an adult said without hesitation. Sit up straight, comb your hair, help out around the house, eat your vegetables, say your prayers and maybe Daddy won't take the belt to you tonight. He remembers the first time he asked his mother why Neil hit him when he did something wrong, why Jimmy Easton's dad just took away his comic books or made him mow the lawn.

He remembers the taste of blood in his mouth when his mother backhanded him across the face and told him it was because he was rotten inside.

Remembers making rule number one: Never tell anyone.

Billy jerks his thoughts away from that house, from his last image of his mother, standing in the kitchen and telling Neil that she was leaving, she was done. Remembers her telling Neil to 'keep the brat' when he said he wouldn't let her take his son. She didn't say goodbye.

Neil had sold the house the next day and they'd moved to LA and after a few weeks of trying to do everything even more right, Billy decided that he wasn't going to follow anybody else's rules anymore. But the damage was done with Neil. He'd seen the soft, yielding underbelly underneath the new devil-may-care exterior and he seemed to take pleasure in ripping Billy open to let it spill out.

Billy never made that mistake again, made sure he was the strongest, the wildest, the top of the heap everywhere else; be it school or the beach or the gang of kids in the neighborhood. Nobody was ever going to take advantage of him again. Billy might not be able to hit back at Neil but he'd damn well hit first at anybody else.

Rule number three: Better to start the fight then have one sneak up on you.

The necklace fell from his fingers as Billy stiffly stood up and grabbed his jacket. Time to get Max. Absently, he remembered the way she'd swung at him, gone right for his balls with a bat out of a horror movie, made him swear to leave her alone, her friends alone.

Max had made her first rule that night; not to let anybody fuck with

her or her friends. It was a good rule. One she'd need if she was going to grow up in Neil's house. Neil had never raised a hand to her, didn't even shout in her presence usually, and as much as it grated on Billy to think that Neil liked her better than his own flesh and blood, at the same time he was grateful.

If he could just get Max to see how the world worked, how people would cut at you at the slightest sign of weakness, maybe she'd avoid learning the hard way. Like he did. If that meant Billy treated her like shit most of the time and did what he could to make her see that nobody was going to treat her special just because she was a kid, well. He'd do it. He'd never wanted a sister anyways so who cared if the one he'd wound up with hated him as long as she wasn't bleeding into the carpet.

That was rule number five. Protect Max. The only rule he and Susan shared, not that they'd ever compared notes. And it rankled Billy that it just so happened to be one of Neil's rules too but that's life. It sucks.

Billy walked past Susan on his way out the door and she reached out to press her palm against his arm for a second.

"Drive safely. Please. There's-there's ice out." It was breathed out, barely a whisper, and noise from the other room had her stepping back as if burned. Billy nodded, and left, and didn't acknowledge that he could still feel the weight of her hand through his coat. As he eased out onto the road, he thought about the first aid kit under his bed, the plate of food he'd eaten, the way Susan always tried to convince Neil that whatever dumb thing he'd done wasn't that bad. It never worked but she did it anyway.

Billy didn't pretend to think that it was because she cared about him, like she was a mom to him in any way. It was basic math. As long as Billy was there to share in Neil's anger, there was less on Susan, and none on Max. It was the smart thing to do, trying to keep him around, maybe even try and get him to like her. But it wasn't because of Billy. That's just what people did. They were always looking out for number one, and everything else was just a load of crap. It infuriated him.

Billy pulled into the school parking lot and lit a cigarette, eyes catching on the gleam of a Beamer across the way, and his anger surged. Take Harrington. Running around playing bus driver to a bunch of kids, hanging out in creepy houses and acting like he was their designated protector or some shit. It was crap. If he wasn't a perv, he was up to something else.

The cold seeped into the car and Billy scowled, huddling in his jacket for warmth and ignoring the way his stomach protested the movement. His necklace brushed against his chest and he ran his fingers over it again, eyes still locked on the figure sitting in the car across from him. Oddly, his grandmother's voice came back to him, soft in the silent echo of the sanctuary, and he mutters the familiar words into the stillness of the night.

"Holy Mary, Mother of god. Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

There was something very strange going on in this town and Billy was gonna figure it out, starting with Steve Harrington.

#### **Author's Note:**

Canon Billy is terrible but I have a lot of thoughts about why he's terrible beyond the lazy "he's an antagonist" and one of them is (even though we all love a good Billy and his mom story) that his mom was just as bad as his dad which would have really damaged him at a very impressionable age and because I have no one to ramble to about this idea, you guys get 2k of it. I also headcanon real hard that Neil works at the lab and that's part of why they moved.

Look, I just love this human disaster and need him to get his shit together.